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WASHINGTON—The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom welcomes the release of four Baha'is from a Yemeni prison earlier this week but calls on the U.S. government to urge Yemen to rescind the deportation order against them. The three Iranian nationals and one Iraqi national, all long-time residents of Yemen who had been imprisoned for months without charges, were released on condition that they leave the country within two months.

“The Commission welcomes the Yemeni government’s decision to uphold its obligation under international law to free the four Baha’is,” said Commission Chair Felice D. Gaer. “But the conditionality of the release is deeply troubling and is not in accord with international human rights standards. They should be able to live freely in the society where they and their families have been living and working for 25 years.”

The Commission continues to be concerned over the arrest and jailing of at least three Yemeni Christians who are converts from Islam.* According to the State Department, some of the Christians were arrested for “promoting Christianity and distributing the Bible,” although no formal charges have been filed by Yemeni authorities. Since apostasy is a capital crime in Yemen, there is credible fear for the well-being of these imprisoned Christians.

"The arrests over the past five months appear to indicate a new, disturbing trend of government-sanctioned intolerance of religious minorities in Yemen, a trend that must be reversed," Gaer said.

The Commission reiterates its recommendation that the U.S. government urge the Yemeni government to immediately release all religious prisoners and to reassure Yemeni religious minorities of its obligations to protect freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief as guaranteed in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Yemen is a State party. This includes an individual's freedom to "adopt a religion or belief of his choice," and "manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice, and teaching."

*Number based on updated information as of Oct. 29, 2008.